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22 February 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Situation Report In IV Corps, 22 February 1968

1. The current situation in the Delta is extremely critical. The war here could be won or lost within a matter of weeks, depending on what we do.

2. The VC have never been so vulnerable, for most of their Main and Regional Force units are out of their sanctuaries and base areas and are maneuvering or digging in outside the province capitals. They are out in the open, where the French, ARVN and the US forces have always felt the VC could be defeated. Furthermore, most VC units have a high proportion of new recruits who joined under duress, or volunteered under the false impression that Saigon and other key cities had fallen to the VC and that the US was cooperating with the VC to set up a coalition government. Experience in the past few weeks has demonstrated that these new recruits break and flee when attacked by aggressive ARVN or US forces. We could probably win the war in the Delta within a few months with an infusion of US troops who should be injected now to seize the initiative from the VC by attacking their Main and Regional Force units in province after province. VC base areas and supply lines are now vulnerable and relatively undefended, and the VC are completely dependent on these base areas and supply lines. Aggressive penetrations into the base areas to destroy their supply dumps, blockade operations against their supply lines, and offensive operations against their concentrations outside the province capitals, if combined and coordinated, could quickly break the VC winter-spring offensive in the Delta and have a major demoralizing effect on the VC. ARVN can not do this, for its leadership is apathetic, is largely ignoring the possibilities for offensive action and is concentrating on defending the province capitals.

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3. The VC currently appear to be giving their newly-recruited forces combat experience within days after their recruitment, through attacks on RF and PF outposts. These outposts, softened by VC propaganda and psychological terrorism and unable to count on reaction forces from the province capital coming to their rescue, are falling one by one under the VC attacks. The triangular mud fortresses of the outposts are highly vulnerable to VC attacks by recently obtained RPG-7 rockets and 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles. These VC successes in knocking off outposts are giving the new recruits confidence in their offensive capabilities. This is to prepare them for massive attacks against the province capitals. About 200 of 2,000 outposts in the Delta have fallen since the Tet offensive began.

4. We all greatly underestimated the VC logistical buildup. A VC prisoner captured on 1 February by the Chau Doc Provincial Reconnaissance Unit claims that about 10,000 tons of military materiel was covertly shipped by sampans from Cambodia into Chau Doc between the seventh and eleventh lunar months of 1967, when the high water in the canals permitted large-scale shipments. The prisoner was in charge of arranging such shipments with Cambodian authorities. Sources in Kien Giang indicate that supplies from VC depots in Chau Doc are moved through the canals in Kien Giang south to Chuong Thien and the U Minh Forest area. We do not know the scope of military shipments from Cambodia into other border provinces, but there are indications that VC supplies for Dinh Tuong Province are coming from Cambodia through Kien Tuong Province.

5. With ARVN forces largely immobilized in static defensive postures within and around Delta province capitals, the countryside is going to the VC by default. Prior to the winter-spring campaign which began in late October, there were roughly 80,000 VC in the Delta. The VC had a tough time recruiting during the first three months of the campaign, but appear to be having tremendous success since the Tet offensive began. A 17-year old VC squad leader, who defected in Chau Doc Province, claims that the 50-man VC Regional Force company in Tinh Bien District incorporated the village guerrilla platoons from the district into the unit prior to the Tet offensive to form a 300-man battalion. On 31 January members of this battalion were able to recruit 500 additional young men from five villages of Tinh Bien District by claiming that the key cities of South Vietnam had fallen into VC hands and that the Americans were cooperating with the VC. A report from Vinh Binh states that the VC

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were able to recruit the equivalent of two new companies of young and old men in the two villages to the immediate east of Tra Vinh, areas that had previously been considered secure, under false pretences of VC victories and US cooperation. Reports from Go Cong indicate that the VC has doubled its strength in that province in the past three months, and reports from Chuong Thien state that the VC have recruited 1,000 more men in the past three months. On the other hand, there are also reports indicating that some of the recent recruits have already defected from the VC. Reports from various sources conflict; but we know that the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) in Vinh Long killed ten VC on 18 February, and they estimated that the eldest was not over 16, but all had AK-47's. So the VC is arming some of its new recruits very well.

6. It is difficult to determine what is happening in the countryside. Lines of communication are severed all over the Delta, and we are out of touch with most of our Census Grievance Cadre in the hamlets and with hamlet informants. But we have more and better prisoner interrogation reports than ever before, and the various collection agencies are cooperating and sharing information to an unprecedented extent. On the basis of everything I have read, seen and heard, I believe that the VC in the Delta are now stronger than they ever were, despite the Tet offensive casualties. They are massing forces outside many of the province capitals in the Delta and are conducting probing attacks against many of the capitals and infiltrating reconnaissance units into others. They have control of the countryside by default of the GVN and are conducting psychological terrorism to frighten the people in the province capitals and district towns. They were defeated in the Tet offensive when they had the element of surprise in their favor, but this surprise was achieved through security at the expense of good intelligence and detailed planning and preparation. The next wave of attacks in the Delta, and I expect that they will come within a matter of days or weeks, will surprise no one, for the VC are deliberately threatening such attacks to keep ARVN in the cities and towns. When they do attack, the casualties on both sides and among the civilians could be tremendous.

7. What we do in the next few weeks, if not days, is extremely important. If we do nothing extraordinary, I believe we could lose the Delta, which is most important in terms of population and its "Rice Bowl" and strategically as any area in Vietnam. In order to save the Delta and, perhaps, turn the tide of war down here, I strongly recommend the following:

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a. Send to the Delta immediately an adequate force of US troops. The arrival and effective deployment of such a force could be as important psychologically to ARVN and the civilian population as it would be militarily.

b. Persuade appropriate GVN authorities to send General Thang here immediately to replace General Manh. I do not know how good a military tactician General Thang is, but he is a leader and ARVN and the people need a decisive leader whom they can respect right now.

c. We need to set up District Intelligence Operating Center Committees (DIOCCS) in almost every district as soon as possible to improve the flow of intelligence from the countryside.

d. We need to set up from the ranks of the RF and PF, as rapidly as possible, District Mobile Security Forces to release the ARVN RD battalions back to maneuver status.

e. We must greatly improve the armament of the National Police. They have only a few carbines in the districts, where they should have at least one BAR and one M-79 and more rifles or carbines.

f. We must equip the PRU's with M-16's and M-60's. They are complaining about the VC now having superior fire power.

g. We must equip the RD teams with more automatic firepower and with three M-79's per team, and we must train them to fight better.

h. All of these things can not be done in a week or a month, but I have listed them in order of importance.

O/DCI/SAVA/VAS: [] :lkp:22Feb68

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23 Feb 68

The Honorable William P. Bundy
Assistant Secretary for East Asian
and Pacific Affairs

25X1 Attached is the report from our regional officer in IV Corps which I discussed at the 22 February non-group meeting. This is the full version. An abbreviated version giving only the intelligence data but omitting all the implicit policy recommendations is being separately circulated [redacted] This full text is going only to you and the other recipients of this memorandum.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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